Title: Representation of India in Select British Women Novelists and Travel Writers of the Long Eighteenth Century

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Synopsis

India often appeared in the literature of the long eighteenth century as the exotic other and occupied an increasingly prominent space in the literary imagination of the Enlightenment. As the colonial enterprise gathered momentum, the colonized spaces became subjects of critical representation. India, one of the major outposts of empire consequently figured prominently as Europe's 'Other' in a wide variety of texts including plays, travelogues and novels in the long eighteenth century. The Enlightenment project to map and know its cultural others contained cartography, anthropology and a wide variety of disciplines. As Edmund Burke was to point out: "Now the Great Map of Mankind is unrolled at once; and there is no state or gradation of barbarism, and no mode of refinement which we have not at the same time instant under our view" (Burke, 351).

It is undeniable fact that the representation of India by the British writers is inextricably entangled with the imperial enterprise and adds a significant impetus to the politics of empire-building in India. The representation of India is informed by the cultural and psychological coordinates of colonialism. In case of the British writers it is guided by the Enlightenment discourses on progress, perfectibility, reason, civilization and reform. For the British writers India as a geographical space was of paramount importance for sublimating the fortune of Britain into a seat of superpower. It was also a psychological space for those who did not come to the country and knew about India through the relatives and others who lived in India and constructed an image of India in their own way. A substantial number of women novelists represented India and they significantly departed from their male counterpart. For the male writers, like Dryden and Pope India is the 'Other', apt for the economic and political incursions. There is a conscious attempt to imagine India as the feminine and the European self as the masculine. The main contours of the categorization of the 'Other' created several identifiable binaries like male-female, rational-superstitious civilized-primitive and so on. For example, John Dryden in his famous heroic tragedy, *Aureng-Zebe*(1675) not only manipulates and distorts Indian history but also constantly projects the king as a feminized hero.

One significant category which has not been probed adequately is the representation of India by women novelists of the period. With the proliferation of print culture a substantial number of women writers participated in the public sphere on an unprecedented level. Though they gradually acquired some space fostered by the cheap print culture and attempted to assert their selfhood, they were aware of the pervasive patriarchal hegemony. While the works of the male writers echo what Suvir Kaul calls 'anthems of empire', the novels of women writers are

fraught with ambivalence and at times provide ample insights into the paradoxical nature of colonial rule. The women novelists like Phebe Gibbes, Elizabeth Hamilton and Lady Morgan (Sydney Owenson) departed from the stereotypical representation of India, disrupted the rigid self- other binary and challenged the values inherent in the process of the consolidation of empire.

This dissertation will probe into the ambivalence of the representation to ask certain fundamental questions- where were these novelists located vis-à-vis society? To what extent were they aware of their situatedness between a colonizing race and a marginalized female status? How is this liminality conveyed in their texts? Was this representation uniform or multifarious? While the novels will be the core thrust of the thesis, I shall also seek to look at the travel texts of women who were part of India travelling with their husbands like Jemima Kindersley and Eliza Fay. We notice a stance of empathy towards the colonizers in the works of the women writers of the long eighteenth century. Though many critics argue that these writers deliberately or inadvertently became implicated within the structures of colonialism, they often colluded with the imperialist objectives. Eliza Fay's *Letters from India* (1816) and Jemima Kindersley's *Letters from the Island of Teneriffe, Brazil, The Cape of good Hope, and the East Indies* (1777) show their identification with the subjugated 'Other' and an implicit challenge of the legitimacy of colonial rule. The dialectic of the legitimization and critique of the British colonialism will be analyzed through the close textual references of Phebe Gibbes's *Hartly House, Calcutta* (1789), Elizabeth Hamilton's *Translations of the Letters of a Hindu Rajah* (1796) and Lady Morgan's *The Missionary: an Indian Tale* (1811). We see a good number of texts bring to the foreground the ruthless violence of the colonial enterprise and sometimes implicitly or explicitly challenged the legitimacy of colonial rule. Unfortunately these texts especially the novels are yet to gain enough critical attention. As Suvir Kaul points out

> Imperial success, of course, had bred historiographical blindness to the relentlessly contingent, tentative, and even stumbling means by which territories were subjugated and empires consolidated: the drama of empire was given a more finished form than its actual performance warranted. A great many texts and other evidence that attest to the misgivings, anxieties, and brutalities of colonial power were sidelined in order to tell these tales of historical inevitability (Kaul 21).

The dissertation will be tentatively divided into the following chapters: 1.Introduction 2.Theoretical Framework 3.Narrating Cultural Encounter: Representation of India in Phebe Gibbes's *Hartly House, Calcutta* 4. "A Presumptuous Effort": Representation of India in *Translations of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* 5. "My Indian Venture": Representation of India in Lady Morgan's *The Missionary: An Indian Tale* 6. Mapping the Gaze of the British Women Travellers: Representation of India in Jemima Kindersley and Eliza Fay 7. Conclusion.

My hypothesis is that women novelists were conscious of their status as part of the colonial process. Yet they were also aware of the operation of power in their own maginalised position. At times they felt fortunate as utilizers of the colonial riches. They also questioned the precepts of colonial dominion when they realized how they themselves were commodified within their own culture like the objects extracted from other lands. These women writers were both part of and apart from the practices that went into the making of empire and therefore shared a

paradoxical relationship with colonial enterprise. This gives rise to heterogeneous and polyvalent responses to the space they represented. It is this heterogeneity that the thesis will seek to probe.

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